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THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST
AND
THE SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST

HEART AND LIFE BOOKLETS.

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TWO SERMONS
BY
F. W. ROBERTSON
OF BRIGHTON

SECOND EDITION

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THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

JOHN xvi. 31, 32.—"Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

THERE are two kinds of solitude: the first consisting of insulation in space; the other of isolation of the spirit. The first is simply separation by distance. When we are seen, touched, heard by none, we are said to be alone; and all hearts respond to the truth of that saying. This is not solitude: for sympathy can people our solitude with a crowd. The fisherman on the ocean lone at night is not alone when he remembers the earnest longings which

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are arising up to heaven at home for his safety—the traveller is not alone when the faces which will greet him on his arrival seem to beam upon him as he trudges on—the solitary student is not alone when he feels that human hearts will respond to the truths which he is preparing to address to them.

The other is loneliness of soul. There are times when hands touch ours, but only send an icy chill of unsympathizing indifference to the heart: when eyes gaze into ours, but with a glazed look which cannot read into the bottom of our souls: when words pass from our lips, but only come back as an echo reverberated without reply through dreary solitude: when the multitude throng and press us, and we cannot say as Christ said, "Somebody hath touched me": for the contact has been not between soul and soul, but only between form and form.

And there are two kinds of men who

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feel this last solitude in different ways. The first are the men of self-reliance : self-dependent : who ask no counsel, and crave no sympathy : who act and resolve alone—who can go sternly through duty, and scarcely shrink let that will be crushed in them. Such men command respect : for whoever respects himself, constrains the reverence of others. They are invaluable in those professions of life in which sensitive feeling would be a superfluity ; they make iron commanders ; surgeons who do not shrink ; and statesmen who do not flinch from their purpose for the dread of unpopularity. But mere self-dependence is weakness : and the conflict is terrible when a human sense of weakness is felt by such men. Jacob was alone when he slept in his way to Padan Aram, the first night that he was away from his father's roof, with the world before him, and all the old broken promises : and Elijah was alone in the wilder-

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ness when the court had deserted him and he said, "They have digged down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword : and I, even I, only left, and they seek my life to take away." But the loneliness of the ten Jacob was very different from that of the stern Elijah. To Jacob the sympathy he yearned for was realized in form of a simple dream. A ladder raised from earth to heaven figured the possibility of communion between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. Elijah's case, the storm, and the earthquake, and the fire, did their convulsive work in the soul, before a still, serene voice told him that he was not alone. In such a spirit the sense of weakness comes with a burst of agony, and the dreadful conviction of being alone manifests itself with a rending of the heart of rock. It is only so that such souls can be taught that the Father is with them, and that they are not alone.

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There is another class of men who live in sympathy. These are affectionate minds which tremble at the thought of being alone: not from want of courage or from weakness of intellect comes their dependence upon others, but from the intensity of their affections. It is the trembling spirit of humanity in them. They want not aid, nor even countenance: but only sympathy. And the trial comes to them not in the shape of fierce struggle, but of chill and utter loneliness, when they are called upon to perform a duty on which the world looks coldly, or to embrace a truth which has not found lodgment yet in the breasts of others.

It is to this latter and not to the former class that we must look if we would understand the spirit in which the words of the text were pronounced. The deep Humanity of the Soul of Christ was gifted with those finer sensibilities of affectionate nature which

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stand in need of sympathy. He not only gave sympathy, but wanted it, too, from others. He who selected the gentle John to be His friend—who found solace in female sympathy, attended by the women who ministered to Him out of their substance—who in the Trial hour, could not bear even to pray without the human presence, which is the pledge and reminder of God's presence, had nothing in Him of the hard, merely self-dependent character. Even this verse testifies to the same fact. A stern spirit never could have said, "I am not alone: the Father is with me"—never would have felt the loneliness which needed the balancing truth. These words tell of a struggle: an inward reasoning: a difficulty and a reply: a sense of solitude—"I shall be alone"; and an immediate correction of that; "not alone—the Father is with me."

There is no thought connected with

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The Life of Christ more touching, none that seems so peculiarly to characterize His spirit, than the solitariness in which He lived. Those who understood Him best only understood Him half. Those who knew Him best scarcely could be said to *know* Him. On this occasion the disciples thought—Now we do understand—now we do believe. The lonely spirit answered, “Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone.”

Very impressive is that trait in His history. He was in this world alone.

I. First, then, we meditate on the Loneliness of Christ.

II. On the temper of His solitude.

I. The Loneliness of Christ was caused by the Divine elevation of His character. His infinite superiority severed Him from sympathy—His ex-

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quisite affectionateness made that want of sympathy a keen trial.

There is a second-rate greatness which the world can comprehend. If we take two who are brought into direct contrast by Christ Himself, the one the type of human, the other that of Divine excellence, the Son of Man and John the Baptist, this becomes clearly manifest. John's life had a certain rude, rugged goodness, on which was written, in characters which required no magnifying-glass to read, spiritual excellence. The world on the whole accepted him. Pharisees and Sadducees went to his baptism. The people idolized him as a prophet; and if he had not chanced to cross the path of a weak prince and a revengeful woman, we can see no reason why John might not have finished his course with joy, recognised as irreproachable. If we inquire why it was that the world accepted John and rejected Christ, one reply appears to be

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that the life of the one was finitely simple and one-sided, that of the Other divinely complex. In physical nature, the naturalist finds no difficulty in comprehending the simple structure of the lowest organizations of animal life, where one uniform texture, and one organ performing the office of brain and heart and lungs, at once, leave little to perplex. But when he comes to study the complex anatomy of man, he has the labour of a lifetime before him. It is not difficult to master the constitution of a single country; but when you try to understand the universe, you find infinite appearances of contradiction: law opposed by law: motion balanced by motion: happiness blended with misery: and the power to elicit a Divine order and unity out of this complex variety is given to only a few of the gifted of the race. That which the structure of man is to the structure of the limpet: that which the

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universe is to a single country, the complex and boundless soul of Christ was to the souls of other men. Therefore, to the superficial observer, His life was a mass of inconsistencies and contradictions. All thought themselves qualified to point out the discrepancies. The Pharisees could not comprehend how a holy Teacher could eat with publicans and sinners. His own brethren could not reconcile His assumption of a public office with the privacy which He aimed at keeping. "If thou doest these things, show thyself to the world." Some thought He was "a good man,"—others said, "Nay—but he deceiveth the people." And hence it was that He lived to see all that acceptance which had marked the earlier stage of His career, as, for instance, at Capernaum, melt away. First, the Pharisees took the alarm: then the Sadducees: then the political party of the Herodians: then the People. That was the most

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terrible of all: for the enmity of the upper classes is impotent; but when that cry of brute force is stirred from the deeps of society, as deaf to the voice of reason as the ocean in its strength churned into raving foam by the winds, the heart of mere earthly oak quails before that. The Apostles, at all events, did quail. One denied: another betrayed: all deserted. They "were scattered, each to his own:" and the Truth Himself was left alone in Pilate's judgment-hall.

Now learn from this a very important distinction. To feel solitary is no uncommon thing. To complain of being alone, without sympathy and misunderstood, is general enough. In every place, in many a family, these victims of diseased sensibility are to be found, and they might find a weakening satisfaction in observing a parallel between their own feelings and those of Jesus. But before that parallel is assumed, be

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very sure that it is, as in His case, the elevation of your character which severs you from your species. The world has small sympathy for Divine goodness: but it also has little for a great many other qualities which are disagreeable to it. You meet with no response—you are passed by—find yourself unpopular—meet with little communion.—Well? Is that because you are *above* the world, nobler, devising and executing grand plans which they cannot comprehend: vindicating the wronged, proclaiming and living on great principles: offending it by the saintliness of your purity, and the unworldliness of your aspirations? Then yours is the loneliness of Christ. Or is it that you are wrapped up in self—cold, disobliging, sentimental, indifferent about the welfare of others, and very much astonished that they are not deeply interested in you? You must not use these words of Christ. They have nothing to do with you.

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Let us look at one or two of the occasions on which this loneliness was felt.

The first time was when He was but twelve years old, when His parents found Him in the Temple, hearing the doctors and asking them questions. High thoughts were in the Child's soul: expanding views of life: larger views of duty and His own destiny.

There is a moment in every true life—to some it comes very early—when the old routine of duty is not large enough—when the parental roof seems too low, because the Infinite above is arching over the soul—when the old formulas, in creeds, catechisms, and articles, seem to be narrow, and they must either be thrown aside, or else transformed into living and breathing realities—when the earthly father's authority is being superseded by the claims of a Father in heaven.

That is a lonely, lonely moment, when

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the young soul first feels God—when this earth is recognised as an “awful place, yea, the very gate of heaven.” When the dream-ladder is seen planted against the skies, and we wake, and the dream haunts us as a sublime reality.

You may detect the approach of that moment in the young man or the young woman by the awakened spirit of inquiry: by a certain restlessness of look, and an eager earnestness of tone: by the devouring study of all kinds of books: by the waning of your own influence, while the inquirer is asking the truth of the Doctors and Teachers in the vast Temple of the world: by a certain opinionativeness, which is austere and disagreeable enough: but the austere moment of the fruit's taste is that in which it is passing from greenness into ripeness. If you wait in patience, the sour will become sweet. Rightly looked at, that opinionativeness

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is more truly anguish: the fearful solitude of feeling the insecurity of all that is human: the discovery, that life is real; and forms of social and religious existence hollow. The old moorings are torn away, and the soul is drifting, drifting, drifting, very often without compass, except the guidance of an unseen hand, into the vast infinite of God. Then come the lonely words, and no wonder, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

2. That solitude was felt by Christ in trial. In the desert: in Pilate's judgment-hall: in the garden, He was alone—and alone must every son of man meet his' trial-hour. The individuality of the soul necessitates that. Each man is a new soul in this world: untried, with a boundless Possible before him. No one can predict what he may become, prescribe his duties, or mark out his obligations. Each man's

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own nature has its own peculiar rules : and he must take up his life-plan alone, and persevere in it in a perfect privacy with which no stranger intermeddeth. Each man's temptations are made up of a host of peculiarities, internal and external, which no other mind can measure. You are tried alone—alone you pass into the desert—alone you must bear and conquer in the Agony—alone you must be sifted by the world. There are moments known only to a man's own self, when he sits by the poisoned springs of existence, "yearning for a morrow which shall free him from the strife." And there are trials more terrible than that. Not when vicious inclinations are opposed to holy, but when virtue conflicts with virtue, is the real rending of the soul in twain. A temptation, in which the lower nature struggles for mastery, can be met by the whole united force of the spirit. But it is when obedience to a heavenly

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Father can be only paid by disobedience to an earthly one: or fidelity to duty can be only kept by infidelity to some, entangling engagement: or the straight path must be taken over the misery of others: or the counsel of the affectionate friend must be met with a "Get thee behind me, Satan,"—Oh! it is then, when human advice is unavailable, that the soul feels what it is to be alone.

Once more—the Redeemer's soul was alone in dying. The hour had come—they were all gone, and He was, as He predicted, left alone. All that is human drops from us in that hour. Human faces flit and fade, and the sounds of the world become confused. "I shall die alone"—yes, and alone you live. The philosopher tells us that no atom in creation touches another atom—they only approach within a certain distance; then the attraction ceases, and an invisible something repels—they only *seem* to touch. No soul touches another soul

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except at one or two points; and those chiefly external,—a fearful and a lonely thought; but one of the truest of life. Death only realizes that which has been fact all along. In the central deeps of our being we are alone.

II. The spirit or temper of that solitude.

I. Observe its grandeur. I am alone, yet not alone. There is a feeble and sentimental way in which we speak of the Man of sorrows. We turn to the cross, and the agony, and the loneliness, to touch the softer feelings; to arouse compassion. You degrade *that* loneliness by your compassion. Compassion! compassion for Him! Adore if you will—respect and reverence that sublime solitariness with which none but the Father was—but no pity: let it draw out the firmer and manlier graces of the soul. Even tender sympathy seems out of place.

For even in human things, the

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strength that is in a man can be only learnt when he is thrown upon his own resources and left alone. What a man, can do in conjunction with others does not test the man. Tell us what he can do alone. It is one thing to defend the truth when you know that your audience are already prepossessed, and that every argument will meet a willing response: and it is another thing to hold the truth when truth must be supported, if at all, alone—met by cold looks and unsympathizing suspicion. It is one thing to rush on to danger with the shouts and the sympathy of numbers: it is another thing when the lonely chieftain of the sinking ship sees the last boatful disengage itself, and folds his arms to go down into the majesty of darkness, crushed, but not subdued.

•Such and greater far was the strength and majesty of the Saviour's solitariness. It was not the trial of the lonely hermit. There is a certain gentle and pleasing

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melancholy in the life which is lived alone. But there are the forms of nature to speak to him, and he has not the positive opposition of mankind if he has the absence of actual sympathy. It is a solemn thing, doubtless, to be apart from men, and to feel eternity rushing by like an arrowy river. But the solitude of Christ was the solitude of a crowd. In that single Human bosom dwelt the Thought which was to be the germ of the world's life: a thought unshared, misunderstood, or rejected. Can you not feel the grandeur of those words, when the Man, reposing on His solitary strength, felt the last shadow of perfect isolation pass across His soul: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Next, learn from these words self-reliance. "Ye shall leave me alone." Alone then the Son of Man was content to be. He threw Himself on His own solitary thought: did not go down to

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meet the world ; but waited, though it might be for ages, till the world should come round to Him. He appealed to the Future: did not aim at seeming consistent : left His contradictions unexplained : I came from the Father : I leave the world, and go to the Father. " Now," said they, " thou speakest no proverb : " that is, enigma. But many a hard and enigmatical saying before He had spoken, and He left them all. A thread runs through all true acts, stringing them together into one harmonious chain : but it is not for the Son of God to be anxious to prove their consistency with each other.

This is self-reliance—to repose calmly on the thought which is deepest in our bosoms, and be unmoved if the world will not accept it yet. To live on your own convictions against the world, is to overcome the world—to believe that what is truest in you is true for all : to abide by that, and not be over-anxious

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to be heard or understood, or sympathized with, certain that at last all must acknowledge the same, and that while you stand firm, the world will come round to you: that is independence. It is not difficult to get away into retirement, and there live upon your own convictions: nor is it difficult to mix with men, and follow their convictions: but to enter into the world, and there live out firmly and fearlessly, according to your own conscience, that is Christian greatness.

There is a cowardice in this age which is not Christian. We shrink from the consequences of truth. We look round and cling dependently. We ask what men will think; what others will say—whether they will not stare in astonishment. Perhaps they will; but he who is calculating that, will accomplish nothing in this life. The Father—the Father which is with us and in us—what does He think? God's work

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cannot be done without a spirit of independence. A man is got some way in the Christian life when he has learned to say humbly and yet majestically, "I dare to be alone."

Lastly,—remark the humility of this loneliness. Had the Son of Man simply said, I can be alone, He would have said no more than any proud, self-relying man can say. But when He added, "because the Father is with me," that independence assumed another character, and self-reliance became only another form of reliance upon God. Distinguish between genuine and spurious humility. There is a false humility which says, "It is my own poor thought, and I must not trust it. I must distrust my own reason and judgment, because they are my own. I must not accept the dictates of my own conscience, for is it not my own, and is not trust in self the great fault of our fallen nature?"

Very well. Now, remember some-

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thing else. There is a Spirit which beareth witness with our spirits—there is a God who “is not far from any one of us”—there is a “Light which lighteth every man which cometh into the world.” Do not be unnaturally humble. The thought of your mind perchance is the Thought of God. To refuse to follow that may be to disown God. To take the judgment and conscience of other men to live by, where is the humility of that? From whence did their conscience and judgment come? Was the fountain from which they drew exhausted for you? If they refused like you to rely on their own conscience, and you rely upon it, how are you sure that it is more the Mind of God than your own which you have refused to hear?

Look at it in another way. The charm of the words of great men, those grand sayings which are recognised as true as soon as heard, is this, that you recognise them as wisdom which has

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passed across your own mind. You feel that they are your own thoughts come back to you, else you would not at once admit them: "All that floated across me before, only I could not say it, and did not feel confident enough to assert it: or had not conviction enough to put it into words." Yes, God spoke to you what He did to them: only they believed it, said it, trusted the Word within them, and you did not. Be sure that often when you say, "it is only my own poor thought, and I am alone,"—the real correcting thought is this, "alone, but the Father is with me,"—therefore I can live that lonely conviction.

There is no danger in this, whatever timid minds may think—no danger of mistake, if the character be a true one. For we are not left in uncertainty in this matter. It is given to us to know our base from our noble hours: to distinguish between the voice which is from

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above, and that which speaks from below, out of the abyss of our animal and selfish nature. Samuel could distinguish between the impulse, quite a human one, which would have made him select Eliab out of Jesse's sons, and the deeper judgment by which "the Lord said, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, for I have refused him." Doubtless deep truth of character is required for this, for the whispering voices get mixed together, and we dare not abide by our own thoughts, because we think them our own, and not God's: and this because we only now and then endeavour to know in earnest. It is only given to the habitually true to know the difference. He knew it, because all His blessed life long He could say, "My judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him which sent me."

The practical result and inference of

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all this is a very simple but a very deep one: the deepest of existence. Let life be a life of faith. Do not go timorously about, inquiring what others think, what others believe, and what others say. It seems the easiest, it is the most difficult, thing in life to do this—believe in God. God is near you. Throw yourself fearlessly upon Him. Trembling mortal, there is an unknown might within your soul which will wake when you command it. The day may come when all that is human, man and woman, will fall off from you, as they did from Him. Let His strength be yours. Be independent of them all now. The Father is with you. Look to Him, and He will save you.

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1 JOHN iii. 4, 5.—“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.”

THE heresy with which the Apostle St. John had to contend in his day was an error of a kind and character which it is hard for us, with our practical, matter-of-fact modes of thinking, to comprehend. There were men so over-refined and fastidious that they could not endure the thought of anything spiritual being connected with materialism. They could not believe in anything being pure that was also fleshly, for flesh and sinfulness were to them synonymous terms. They could

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not believe in the Divine Humanity, for humanity was to them the very opposite of that which was Divine: and accordingly, while admitting the Divinity of Jesus, they denied the reality of His materialism. They said of His earthly life exactly what the Roman Catholic says of the miracle, he claims to be performed in the Supper of the Lord. The Roman Catholic maintains that it is simply an illusion of the senses; there is the taste of the bread, the look of the bread, the smell of the bread, but it is all a deception: there is no bread really there; it is only the spiritual body of the Lord. That which the Romanist says now of the elements in the Lord's Supper, did these ancient heretics say respecting the Body and the Life of Jesus. There was, they said, the sound of the human voice, there was the passing from place to place, there were deeds done, there were sufferings undergone, but these were all an illusion and

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a phantasma—a thing that appeared, but did not really exist. The Everlasting Word of God was making Itself known to the minds of men through the senses by an illusion; for to say that the Word of God was made flesh, to maintain that He connected Himself with sinful, frail humanity—this was degradation to the Word—this was destruction to the purity of the Divine Essence.

You will observe that in all this there was an attempt to be eminently spiritual; and what seems exceedingly marvellous, is the fact withal that these men led a life of extreme licentiousness. Yet it is not marvellous, if we think accurately, for we find even now that over-refinement is but coarseness. And so, just in the same way, these ultra-spiritualists, though they would not believe that the Divine Essence could be mingled with human nature without degradation, yet they had no intention

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of elevating human nature by their own conduct. They thought they showed great respect for Jesus in all this; they denied the reality of His sufferings: they would not admit the conception that frail, undignified humanity was veritably His, but nevertheless they had no intention of living more spiritually themselves. It was therefore that we find in another Epistle, St. John gives strict commands to his converts not to admit these heretics into their houses: and the reason that he gives is, that by so doing they would be partakers, not of their evil doctrines, but of their evil deeds. They were a licentious set of men, and it is necessary to keep this in view if we would understand the writings of St. John. It is for this reason, therefore, that he says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of

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the Word of Life, declare we unto you." It is for this reason that he, above all the Apostles, narrates with scrupulous accuracy all the particulars respecting the Redeemer's risen Body,—that He joined in the repast of the broiled fish and the honeycomb: and that he dwells with such minuteness on the fact that there came from the Body of the Redeemer blood and water: "not water only, but water and blood"; and it is for this reason that in speaking of Antichrist he says, "Every spirit, that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God, and this is that Spirit of Antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come." So then we learn from this that the most spiritual of all the Apostles was the one who insisted most earnestly on the materialism of the human nature of our Lord. He who alone had penetrated into that Realm beyond, where the King was seen on

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His Throne of Light, was the one who felt most strongly that in Humanity there was nothing degrading. In the natural propensities of human nature, there is nothing to be ashamed of: there is nothing for a man to be ashamed of but Sin—there is nothing more noble than a perfect human nature.

My brethren, though the error of the ancient times cannot be repeated in this age in the same form, though this strange belief commends itself not to our minds, yet there may be such an exclusive dwelling upon the Divinity of Jesus as absolutely to destroy His real humanity; there may be such a morbid sensitiveness when we speak of Him as taking our nature, as will destroy the fact of His sufferings—yes, and destroy the reality of His Atonement also. There is a way of speaking of the sinlessness of Jesus that would absolutely make that scene on Calvary a mere

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pageant in which He was acting a part in a drama, during which He was not really suffering, and did not really crush the propensities of His human nature. It was for this reason we lately dwelt on the Redeemer's sufferings; now let us pass onward to the fact of the sinlessness of His nature.

The subject divides itself—first, into the sinlessness of His nature; and, secondly, the power which He possessed from that sinlessness to take away the sins of the world.

With respect to the first branch, we have given us a definition of what sin is: "Sin is the transgression of the law." It is to be observed there is a difference between sin and transgression. Every sin is a transgression of the law, but every transgression of the law is not necessarily a sin. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law. Now mark the difference. It is possible for a man to transgress the

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law of God, not knowingly, and then in inspired language we are told that "sin is not imputed unto him." Yet, for all that, the penalty will follow whenever a man transgresses, but the chastisement which belongs to sin, to known wilful transgression, will not follow.

Let us take a case in the Old Testament, which it may be as well to explain, because sometimes there is a difficulty felt in it. We read of the patriarchs and saints in the Old Testament as living in polygamy. There was no distinct law forbidding it, but there was a law written in the "fleshy tables of the heart," against which it is impossible to transgress without incurring a penalty. Accordingly, though we never find that the patriarchs are blamed for the moral fault, though you never find them spoken of as having broken the written law of God, yet you see they reaped the penalty that ever must be reaped—in the case of one,

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degradation ; in the case of the other, slavery. Jacob's many wives brought dissension and misery into his household, though he did it innocently and ignorantly, and he reaped the penalty—quarrels and wretchedness. In all this there is penalty, but there is not sin in all this, and therefore there was not excited that agony which comes from the pangs of conscience after wilful sin. Every misery that falls on man has been the consequence of transgression, his own trespass or those of others. It may have been his parents, his grandparents, or his far-back ancestors, who have given him the disadvantages under which he labours. How shall we explain the fact that misery falls alike on the good and on the evil? Only by remembering whether it comes as the penalty of transgression ignorantly done : then it is but the gentle discipline of a Father's love, educating His child, it may be

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warning the child and giving him the knowledge of that law of which he was hitherto ignorant. This wretchedness of the patriarchs, what was it but the corrective dispensation by which the world learnt that polygamy is against the law of God? So the child who cuts his hand with the sharp blade of the knife has learnt a lesson concerning his need of caution for the future, and if well and bravely borne, he is the better for it; but if there has been added to that transgression the sin of disobedience to his parent's command, then there is something inflicted beyond the penalty; there is all that anguish of conscience and remorse which comes as the consequence of sin. Now, we have seen what transgression is, let us try to understand what sin is.

My Christian brethren, it is possible for us to mistake this subject by taking figurative expressions too literally. We

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speak of sin as if it were a thing, as if we were endowed with it, like memory, or judgment, or imagination, as a faculty which must be exercised. Now, let us learn the truth of what sin is—it “is the transgression of the law.” There must be some voluntary act, transgressing some known law, or there is no sin. There were those in the days of St. John who held that sin was merely the infirmity of the flesh; that if a man committed sin and he was to know that it was the working merely of his lower nature, not of his own mind—his faith would save him. Another error was that of the Pharisees in the days of Jesus; and their error was precisely opposite. “Yes,” said the Pharisees, “sin is the transgression of the law. Holiness is conformity to the law, and the lives of the Pharisees being conformable to the ceremonial law, we stand before the world, as touching the righteousness which is in

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the law, blameless." The Redeemer comes, and He gives another exposition of sin. "Sin is the transgression of the law," but there is a law written for the heart, as well as for the outward man. There is a work to be done within as well as without. A murder may be committed, by indulging revenge and malice, though the hand has never been lifted to strike. It is not the outward act that constitutes alone the Morality of Christ, it is the feeling of the heart, the acts of the inner man.

But, then, there is again another error from which we have to guard ourselves. It is a sophistry in which some men indulge themselves. They say, "Well, if the thought is as bad as the act, why should we not therefore do the act? I am as guilty as if I had committed transgression; why should I debar myself from the enjoyment?" It is, I say, but sophistry, for no man that has any conscience can really so

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deceive himself. The Redeemer's doctrine was that many a man whose outward life was pure and spotless would have done the transgression if he had had the opportunity. It is one thing to say that he would have done it if he could, but it is quite another thing to say that a man who has indulged the thought, and has drawn back, is as guilty as if he had actually carried out the evil act. The difference lies in this—the one would have done it if he could, and the other could and would not. We read in the Bible of two men who exemplify this. They both resolved to commit murder, and the opportunity was given to each. Saul threw his javelin with right good will at David's person; he did all that resolution could do, it was but what is called accident that left the javelin quivering in the wall. Opportunity was given also to David. He had resolved to slay Saul, but when the tempting

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opportunity came, when he was bending over Saul, full of the thought of destroying his enemy, at the very last moment he paused—his conscience smote him—he refused to strike. Which of these was the murderer? Saul was the murderer; he had slain in his heart. It was but an accident that prevented it. In the other case there had been the indulgence of a wrong thought, but it was subdued. He might say, he might as well have slain his foe, but would you say that he was in the same position as a murderer? No, Christian brethren, let there be no sophistry of this kind among us. It is but a subtle whisper from our great adversary that would beguile us. Generally there is first a rising of an inclination which is often no sin. This passes on to a guilty resolve—one step more, and the man has committed the sin.

Now, let us turn to the character of

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our blessed Redeemer, and we shall find Him doubly free from all this—as free in desire as free in act. The proof of His perfect purity is to be found in the testimony of His enemies, of His friends, and of those indifferent to Him. We have first the evidence of His enemies. For three long years the Pharisees were watching their victim. There was the Pharisee mingling in every crowd, hiding behind every tree. They examined His disciples; they cross-questioned all around Him; they looked into His ministerial life, into His domestic privacy, into His hours of retirement. They came forward with the sole accusation that they could muster—that He had shown disrespect to the Roman governor. The Roman judge, who at least should know, had pronounced the accusation null and void. There was another spy. It was Judas. If there had been one act of sin, one failing in all the Redeemer's

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career that betrayed ambition, that betrayed any desire to aggrandize Himself, in his hour of terrible remorse, Judas would have remembered it for his own comfort ; but the bitterness of his feelings—that which made life insufferable—was that he had “betrayed innocent blood.”

Pass we on to those who were indifferent. And first we have the opinion of Pilate himself. Contemporary historians tell us that Pilate was an austere and cruel man, a man of firm resolve, and one who shrank not from the destruction of human life ; but we see here that for once the cruel man became merciful : for once the man of resolve became timid. It was not merely that he thought Jesus was innocent ; the hard Roman mind would have cared little for the sacrifice of an obscure Jew. The soul of Pilate was pervaded with the feeling that spotless innocence stood before him, and this feeling extended

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even to Pilate's wife; for we find that she sent to him and said, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." It was not because he was going to pass an unjust sentence—he had often done so before—but she felt that here was an innocent One who must not be condemned. °

Now, let us consider the testimony of His friends. They tell us that during their intercourse of three years, His was a life unsullied by a single spot: and I pray you to remember that tells us something of the holiness of the thirty previous years; for no man springs from sin into perfect righteousness at once. If there has been any early wrong-doing—though a man may be changed—yet there is something left that tells of his early character; a want of refinement, of delicacy, of purity; a tarnish has passed upon the brightness, and cannot be rubbed off. If we turn to the testimony of John the

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Baptist, His contemporary, about the same age, one who knew Him not at first as the Messiah ; yet when the Son of Man comes to him simply as a man, and asks him to baptize Him, John turns away in astonishment, shocked at the idea. "I have need to be baptized of Thee : and comest Thou to me ?" In other words, the purest and the most austere man that could be found on earth, was compelled to acknowledge that in Him who came for Baptism there was neither stain nor spot that the water of Jordan was needed to wash away. So we see there was no actual transgression in our blessed Lord.

Now, let us see what the inward life was ; for it is very possible that there may be no outward transgression, and yet that the heart may not be pure. It is possible that outwardly all may seem right, through absence of temptation, and yet there may be the want of inward perfection. Of the perfection of

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Jesus we can have but one testimony ; it cannot be that of the Apostles, for the lesser cannot judge the greater, and therefore we turn to Himself. He said, " Which of you can charge Me with sin ? " " I and My Father are one. " Now we must remember that just in proportion as a man becomes more holy, does he feel and acknowledge the evil that is in him. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul ; he declared, " I am, the chief of sinners. " But here is One who attained the highest point of human excellence, who was acknowledged, even by His enemies, to be blameless, who declares Himself to be sinless. If, then, the Son of Man were not the promised Redeemer, He, the humblest of mankind, might justly be accused of pride ; the purest of mankind would be deemed to be unconscious of the evil that was in Him. He, who looked so deeply into the hearts of others, is ignorant of His own ; the truest of mankind is guilty of

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the worst of falsehoods ; the noblest of mankind guilty of the sin of sins—the belief that He had no sin. Let but the infidel grant us that human nature has never attained to what it attained in the character of Jesus, then we carry him still farther, that even He whom he acknowledges to be the purest of men declared Himself to be spotless, which, if it were false, would at once do away with all the purity which he grants was His. It was not only the outward acts, but the inner life of Jesus which was so pure. His mind regulates every other mind ; it moves in perfect harmony with the mind of God. In all the just men that ever lived, you will find some peculiarity carried into excess. We note this in the zeal of St. John, in the courage of St. Peter, in the truth-seeking of St. Thomas. It was not so with Jesus: no one department of His human nature ever superseded another : all was harmony there. The one sound which has

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come down from God in perfect melody is His life, the entire unbroken music of Humanity.

We pass on to our second subject—the power there is in the manifested sinlessness of Jesus to take away the sins of the world. There are two aspects in which we are to consider this: first in reference to man, and secondly in reference to God. Our subject to-day will confine itself to the first; on the other, we simply say this: there is, in the eternal constitution of the heavenly government, that which makes the life and death of Jesus the Atonement for the world's sins. Human nature, which fell in Adam, rose again in Christ; in Him it became a different thing altogether in God's sight—redeemed now, hereafter to be perfected.

But we leave this for the present, and consider how the world was purified by the change of its own nature. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men

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unto Me." There are three ways by which this may be done—by Faith, by Hope, and by Love. It is done by Faith, for the most degrading thing in the heart of man is the disbelief in the goodness of human nature. We live in evil, and surrounded by evil, until we have almost ceased to believe in greatness of mind or character. The more a man increases in knowledge of the world, the more does he suspect human nature; a knowing man, according to worldly phraseology, is one that will trust no one. He knows that he himself has his price, and he believes that he can buy anyone else: and this may be called the second fall of man—that moment when all our boyish belief in goodness passes away; when such degradation and anguish of soul comes on, that we cease to believe in woman's purity or in man's integrity: when a man has fallen so low there is nothing in this world that can raise him, except

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faith in the perfect innocence of Jesus. There it is that there bursts upon the world—that of which the world never dreamed — entire, and perfect purity, spotless integrity—no mere dreaming of philosophers and sages—though the dream were a blessed thing to have; the tangible living Being before us, whom we can see, and touch, and hear, so that a man is able to come to his brother with trust in elevated Humanity, and to say, “This is He of whom the Prophets did write.”

But, secondly, trust in Divine Humanity elevates the soul.

It is done by Hope. You must have observed the hopefulness of the character of Jesus—His hopefulness for human nature. If ever there were one who might have despaired, it was He. Full of love Himself, He was met with every sort of unkindness, every kind of derision. There was treachery in one of His disciples, dissension among

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them. He was engaged in the hardest work that man ever tried. He was met by the hatred of the whole world, by torture and the cross; and yet never did the hope of Human Nature forsake the Redeemer's soul. He would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. There was a spark mingling even in the lowest Humanity, which He would fain have fanned into a blaze. The lowest Publican Jesus could call to Him, and touch his heart; the lowest profligate that was ever trodden underfoot by the world was one for whom He could hope still. If He met with penitents He would welcome them; if they were not penitents, but yet felt the pangs of detected guilt, still with hopefulness He pointed to forgiven Humanity; this was His word, even to the woman brought to Him by her accusers, "Go, and sin no more"; in His last moments on the cross, to one who was dying by His side, He

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promised a place in Paradise : and the last words that broke from the Redeemer's lips, what were they but Hope for our Humanity, while the curses were ringing in His ears?—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Now, it is this hopefulness that raises hope in us. Christian brethren, we dare to hope for that nature which Jesus loved, we dare to forgive that nature which Jesus condescended to wear. This frail, evil, weak Humanity of ours, these hearts that yield to almost every gust of temptation, the Son of Man hoped for them. And it is done by Love; hate narrows the heart, love expands the heart. To hate is to be miserable; to love is to be happy. To love, is to have almost the power of throwing aside sin. See the power of love in the hearts of those around Him. He comes to a desponding man, nourishing dark thoughts of the world;

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He speaks encouragingly, and the language of that man is, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." He goes to a man who has loved money all his life. He treats him as a man, and the man's heart is conquered: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." He comes to the coward, who had denied Him, and asks him simply, "Lovest thou Me?" and the coward becomes a martyr, and dares to ask to be crucified. He comes to a sinful woman, who had spent large sums on the adornment of her person, and the ointment which was intended for herself was poured in love upon His feet, mingling with her tears. "She loved much," and much was forgiven.

And it was not during the Redeemer's life alone, that the power of His love extended. It was manifested also after His death. There was the healing act done on the man who asked for alms.

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The Apostles were carried before the Sadducees; and the man on whom this miracle was done stood by them full of strength and courage. The day before, he had been a miserable, cringing suppliant, beseeching pity from the passers-by. But all the wailing tone is gone; the attitude of the suppliant has passed away, and the renovated cripple fronts the supreme judicature of Israel with a lion heart. Ask you what has inspired and dignified that man, and raised him higher in the scale of Humanity? It was the power of love. It is not so much the manifestation of this doctrine or that doctrine, that can separate the soul from sin. It is not the law. It is not by pressing on the lower nature to restrain it that this can be done, but it is by elevating it. He speaks not to the degraded of the sinfulness of sin, but He dwells upon the Love of the Father, upon His tender mercies; and if a man would

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separate himself from the bondage of guilt, there is no other way than this. My Christian brethren, forget that miserable past life of yours, and look up to the streams of mercy ever flowing from the right hand of God.

My brethren, it is on this principle that we desire to preach to the heathen. We would preach neither High Church nor Low Church doctrine. We desire to give Jesus Christ to the world; and in pleading for this I will not endeavour to excite your sympathies by drawing a picture of the heathen world suspended over unutterable misery, and dropping minute by minute into everlasting wretchedness. It is easy to do this; and then to go away calmly and quietly to our comfortable meals, and our handsome habitations, satisfied with having demonstrated so tremendous a fact. But this we say, if we would separate the world from sin, and from the penalty of sin, and the inward misery of the

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heart attendant on sin in this world, and the world to come, it is written in Scripture, "There is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," than the Name of Jesus.

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